

Bloomfelt

I felt my life with both my hands- Emily Dickinson

Q1.-What do you like about the felting technique?

First is the attraction to the natural material, its softness and texture, its volume and yet lightness. I like the muted, sturdy and solid quality of the material which can produce such varying results.

Felting is an ancient art, employing many different processes and in spite of the many technical complexities, it is the inherent simplicity of it all that attracts me. One only needs a few tools and a simple workspace.

It is the magical aspect of felting which never ceases to surprise me.

Felting is a friendly art full of forgiveness and it combines wonderfully with other textile techniques. It is a combination of handwork and painting. The placement of the fibres is repetitive but calming and meditative, and the playing with colors is a soulful and balancing experience.

The actual mechanical process of felting with water and soap is very physical.

Textile arts have always had strong spiritual overtones from how we weave our paths, express our memories, embellish our life's events to how we see our place in the world.

Q2.-Why and accordingly how did you take the approach to felting?

As a young girl I loved to make things with anything that came to hand, boxes of fabric, baskets of ribbons, threads and buttons.

Millenary stores and second hand clothing stalls were my favourite sources for all the things I wanted to play with.

My grandmother was a seamstress who could make anything and I remember how her skilful hands moved over the fabric with grace and precisions. She taught me the basics of sewing, knitting, crocheting and weaving.

The best thing that happened to me was when my parents sent me to an arts and crafts school on Saturdays at the age of eight or nine. I loved that school, the teachers, and all the beautiful things were made there in the textiles textile arts courses as well as metal, wood working, painting, ceramics and jewellery. After high school, I turned to drawing, painting and photography but I still made my own clothes and knitted.

Later I did fine arts in the Minerva Art Academy in the Netherlands, but I found it too restricting. I wanted to get more movement out of the canvases and framed pictures so I started sewing pictures, patchwork, quilting and combining materials which resulted in making art books which I hand bound with textile materials.

My life long fascinations with ancient crafts, folk art and decorative art led me to use them to lighten up traditional painting.

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After I had children, I gave up painting for craft work, which is less absorbing and gave the children and myself more freedom, which then led to toy making. Since my oldest boy had exquisite taste and lots of ideas we made a whole toy world together which is where felting began. I really started to love wool and became more and more obsessed by the endless possibilities of the felting process.

Q3.- What do you want to express in your art? What do you put your main focus on?

There is a whole world inside me. I often dream of something, deep and colourful, which moves and is very mysterious. There are many corners, strange places, folds and holes. I have an enormous need to express that world. It does not really matter how as long as it moves.

Making things sort of balances the extremes of that inner world.

I am inspired by the natural world, its sounds, feel and touch and hence by its various textures and forms.

I like to use a particular material and technique as an expression of itself, rather than as a decoration or a vehicle for a narrative.

The material has to speak.

Felting allows me to do that. It is very free and versatile. It allows me to express feelings in color. The colors are the light that we consciously or subconsciously crave. So the main focus in felting for me is color and texture.

I like my work to carry me away. I like to make a stream of things; I like a good volume of work where one thing leads to another, with one expression leading to another. It is a road without any particular destination but I have to travel it. And that road offers and requires a lot of dreaming experimentation. And one comes upon unexpected material forms such as the mysteries of a simple fold.

Q4. What is the most exciting part of your cooperation with the Cirque du Soleil?

Last year I got a big break in terms of my felt work becoming somewhat more successful commercially.

I was contacted by Cirque du Soleil and asked to show my work, which led to working with François Barbeau, who has an amazing career in costume design in Canada and worldwide. He fell in love with what I was doing, promoted experimentation and research into new materials to be incorporated with felting. We work together very well: he attends my workshops and shows my production at the Cirque du Soleil head office in Montréal.

So far, some of my creations have already been used in Cirque du Soleil shows and considering the scale of the operation, an order from the Cirque can be very time demanding.

The Cirque is an added impetus for continual searching and experimentation and fortunately they have an amazing staff of artists and crafts people whom I love to work with. They also offer me the opportunity to use their great library and documentation center for inspiration.

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These developments have made me realize that I am in a limitless creative world. I am steadily getting closer to what I want to express with felting. I do not know where it leads to. I just have to follow.

To close, I just want to say that felting is a very organic, friendly, communal experience which many could share. Children love doing it. My dream is that Bloomfelt could become a cooperative where we could create and teach and produce our own raw materials for the felting process, sheep for wool and nature for the dyes.

We shall see.